

California's Assessment of the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts' Exams

Prepared by ALTA Language Services, Inc.
For the Judicial Council of California,
Administrative Office of the Courts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Purpose of Study

The Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) contracted ALTA Language Services, Inc. (ALTA) to assess the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts' (CLAC or Consortium) examinations for certifying member state court interpreters. This study was conducted to establish the level of functional equivalency between California's court interpreter certification assessments and the Consortium's assessments, as well as to develop recommendations for standard-setting of the Consortium assessments that would ensure the same passing level of competency required of a candidate to pass the California assessments. (For a complete list and explanation of acronyms referenced throughout this Report, see Appendix 1.) Results of analyses from the study also were to establish whether the Consortium's interpreter certification assessments met the standards required of California interpreter certification assessments and, if not, what improvements could be made to achieve those standards.

II. Background

The Consortium for Language Access in the Courts has created a comprehensive interpreter certification testing program that encompasses both an English-only written examination and a bilingual oral performance examination, modeled after the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE), in more than a dozen languages. The California Court Interpreter Program (CCIP) also consists of a written screening examination and an oral performance examination for certified court interpreters.¹ Both written

“Oral performance examinations for both CCIP and CLAC test the three modes of interpreting required of a court interpreter: the simultaneous mode, the consecutive mode, and sight translation.”

examinations score candidates based upon their ability to correctly answer a variety of multiple-choice questions. Oral performance examinations for both CCIP and CLAC test the three modes of interpreting required of a court interpreter: the simultaneous mode, the consecutive mode, and sight translation.² Additionally, oral test script development for each program is very similar. (For a detailed chart comparing each program's oral exam structure and content, see Appendix 14.) For oral exams, California uses a combined scoring method that includes a holistic evaluation of language and interpreting skills in addition to objective scoring units, while the Consortium strictly uses objective scoring units.³

III. Methodology

Various methodological steps were taken to examine the process used by the Consortium to develop its testing tools, and to present a comparative assessment of the exams used for certifying court interpreters by both CCIP and CLAC. These steps included the following:

- A. **Literature and Document Review:** Literature pertaining to industry standards for valid test development was reviewed in addition to documentation provided by Consortium staff and documentation found on the Consortium's website (see Appendix 16).
- B. **Qualitative Interviews:** ALTA conducted interviews with Consortium key staff members as well as former and current language consultants and exam writers.

1 Currently, California has certification examinations in 12 designated languages: Arabic, Eastern Armenian, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Western Armenian. Interpreters of American Sign Language are eligible to become certified California court interpreters if they hold the Specialist Certificate: Legal granted by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Non-designated languages are referred to as registered languages. Interpreters of registered languages must pass an English proficiency exam (both written and oral).

2 Simultaneous interpretation is the mode in which the interpreter lags slightly behind the source language speaker, interpreting the message into the target language at almost the same time as the original message is being said. In consecutive interpretation, the interpreter listens to a unit of speech (approximately 40-60 words at a time) in the source language and then conveys that message into the target language. Sight translation is the oral interpretation of a written document.

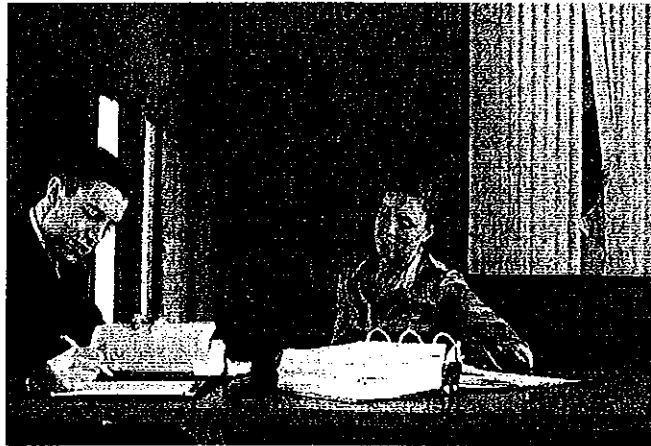
3 According to the Consortium's *Court Interpreter Oral Examination: Test Construction Manual (TCM)*, scoring units are linguistic phenomena that interpreters must be able to render to deliver a complete and accurate interpretation.

- C. **Federal Court Interpreter Test Development Review:** ALTA examined documentation regarding the test development process and structure of the FCICE in comparison to CLAC's test development process and structure. (For a brief history of the development of the Federal Exam, see Appendix 9.)
- D. **Test Content Review:** An in-depth assessment of CLAC's written and oral test content was conducted by a panel of SMEs.
- E. **Comparative Analysis of Test Programs:** Results from the *Study of California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing⁴ (Study 2007)* were compared to the test content review conducted of the Consortium exams; the extent to which the CCIP and CLAC test programs are similar and/or different was assessed.
- F. **Psychometric Audit:** A psychometric evaluation⁵ of the Consortium test content framework and standards was performed by a team of psychometricians and compared to current test industry standards.
- G. **Standard-Setting Session:** A standard-setting session was conducted by a panel of thirteen SMEs to establish the level of functional equivalency between the passing requirements of each program's oral examinations.

IV. Findings

Findings of the research conducted to assess the Consortium's test development process and determine how the Consortium's process compared to test industry standards include the following:

- The Consortium has created a comprehensive interpreter testing program with an impressive body of technical manuals;
- Consortium exam content has been constructed based on solid and consistent test development processes that respect test industry standards with a few areas in need of improvement;
- The Consortium has created and uses a *Court Interpreter Oral Examination: Test Construction Manual (TCM)*, which provides a transparent blueprint for Consortium oral exam development and promotes test equivalency across languages and test versions;
- Many aspects of the Consortium's oral exams were modeled after the Federal interpreter certification exams; and
- The Consortium employs highly qualified subject matter experts at every stage of the process of test development.



FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF REFERENCES, SEE APPENDIX 10.

- 4 In June of 2006, the Administrative Office of the Courts of California contracted for an analysis of the examination process and testing instruments for the certification and registration of California state court interpreters. The results and final recommendations of this analysis were concluded in 2007, and the report based upon those results and recommendations is referred to as *Study 2007*.
- 5 A psychometric evaluation is conducted by testing experts to document and assess a testing program's test blueprints and specifications, as well as any available statistical analyses.

Findings from the comparative analysis of CCIP and CLAC exams conducted include:

- While the constructs of the written exams for each program are somewhat different, they both serve the same function at very similar levels of difficulty: eliminating unqualified candidates from moving on to the oral exam phase of the certification process, while allowing qualified candidates to proceed in the process;
- The structure, content, and level of difficulty of the oral exams for CCIP and CLAC are comparable and adhere to equivalent standards;
- One essential difference between CCIP and CLAC exams is the method of scoring used by each program for its oral examinations: CLAC uses only objective scoring units, while CCIP uses a combination of holistic and objective scoring methods;
- A high degree of overlap exists between CCIP and CLAC's written and oral exam KSAs; and
- All of the KSAs required in the area of Interpreting Skills are tested by both CCIP and CLAC.

V. Analysis

An analysis of findings determined that most areas of the Consortium interpreter certification program meet test industry standards, while a few are in need of improvement to meet test industry standards. Modeling the Consortium oral exams after the Federal oral exams, which have legally been shown to be valid (Arjona, 1985), provided the Consortium with a strong foundation for oral test development. The Consortium's development and use of the *TCM* and an objective scoring method has further facilitated the development of a consistent and transparent method of achieving test validity during each stage of test development for every language for which the Consortium develops an interpreter certification test.

“CLAC's key areas of strength lie in the qualifications of personnel involved in test development, its objective method of oral exam scoring, and its use of the *TCM*.”

CLAC's key areas of strength lie in the qualifications of personnel involved in test development, its objective method of oral exam scoring, and its use of the *TCM*. CLAC's key areas for improvement include the need for further collection of documentation and oral exam statistical data.

The comparative analysis of CCIP and CLAC examinations determined that CCIP and CLAC written and oral exams test candidates at comparable standards of difficulty and at similar standards according to test validity practices. The one KSA (the ability to preserve accuracy) tested by CCIP's written

exam that is not tested by CLAC's is tested in CLAC's oral examination. KSAs tested by CCIP but not tested by CLAC's oral exams were identified as speaking skills that are not tested due to CLAC's objective method of scoring. The use of objective scoring units does not allow for an evaluation of subjective components, such as the testing of a candidate's pronunciation or accent in the foreign language. In fact, the Consortium considers scoring elements such as foreign language accent difficult to test in an objective manner and therefore specifically avoids testing KSAs that cannot be measured through objective scoring. Poor speaking skills will, however, indirectly impact a candidate's score if raters cannot hear or understand a response given on the oral exam.

VI. Conclusions

ALTA's conclusions of the findings and analyses are that, since its inception in 1995, CLAC has created a comprehensive interpreter certification testing program with an impressive body of technical manuals and candidate resources. CCIP and CLAC have many comparable testing elements and both programs have created exams at similar standards and levels of equivalency. In particular, the oral exams of each program contain many common elements, including types of scripts used and the testing of grammatical structures and legal terminology. A high overlap of KSAs tested also exists between the CCIP and CLAC written and oral exams; the difference in KSAs is attributable to the distinct methods of scoring used by each program, but all interpreting KSAs adopted by California are tested in CLAC's exams.

While all testing programs require the continual need for review and maintenance and contain areas that could benefit from improvement, CLAC has created a testing program that is equivalent to California's in terms of validity and content. Results of the standard-setting session conducted for the CLAC oral exam provided further support that Consortium exams certify candidates at a standard comparable to that of California.

VII. Recommendations

It is ALTA's recommendation that California could use CLAC's written exam as a screening device to qualify certified and registered court interpreter candidates. This recommendation is based on CLAC's adherence to test industry standards when developing its written exam content and cut-score.

It is also recommended that since oral certification exams for both California and CLAC have been found to be comparable in structure, content, and level of difficulty, CLAC oral exams could also be used by CCIP to certify California court interpreters. Additional recommendations have been made in the full final report of this study to enhance CLAC's testing program, but are not considered prerequisites to California's use of the Consortium exams.

California's Assessment of the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts' Exams: Final Report

Selected Appendices

*[Chosen to provide information on the structure and content of
the Consortium's oral interpretation exams.]*

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The complete report is available on the California Courts Web site:
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters/

APPENDIX 10 – COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER CERTIFICATION ORAL EXAMS AND THE CONSORTIUM'S ORAL EXAMS

SIGHT TRANSLATION - ENGLISH TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Time Allowed	5 minutes	6 minutes
Length of Passage	230 words	200-225 words
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	22	25
Percent of Total Test	10%	11.6%
Description of Passage	Police or investigative reports	Police or investigative reports

SIGHT TRANSLATION – FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Time Allowed	5 minutes	6 minutes
Length of Passage	230 words	200-225 words
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	22	25
Percent of Total Test	10%	11.6%
Description of Passage	Correspondence, affidavits (formal language)	Correspondence, affidavits (relatively formal language)

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION – MONOLOGUE

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Time Required	7 minutes	7 minutes
Length of Passage	840 words	800-850 words
Rate of Speech	120 wpm	120 wpm
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	65	75
Percent of Total Test	29.5%	34.9%
Description of Passage	Opening/Closing Argument	Opening/Closing Argument

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION – WITNESS TESTIMONY

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Time Required	4 minutes	N/A
Length of Passage	600 words	
Rate of Speech	Varies – up to 160 words per minute, with pauses between Q&A	
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	35	
Percent of Total Test	16%	
Description of Passage	Witness Testimony (in English)	

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETATION

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Time Allowed	15 minutes	22 minutes
Length of Passage	850-900 words	850-950 words
Length of Utterances	1-50 words	1-50 words
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	30 (English to foreign language) 46 (foreign language to English)	40* (English to foreign language) 50* (foreign language to English)
Percent of Total Test	34.5%	41.9%
Description of Passage	Witness Testimony (direct or cross – Federal Court)	Witness Testimony (direct or cross – State Court)

* Some early versions of the Consortium's exams included 75 scoring units in the consecutive section. Subsequent exams include 90 scoring units.

PASS REQUIREMENTS

Test Segment	FCICE	Consortium
Oral Cut-Score	220 scoring units comprised of: grammar and usage (false cognates, use of verbs, interference, etc.), general lexical range (general vocab., legal terms and phrases, idioms/ sayings), and conservation (register, slang, numbers/names, modifiers, embeddings, etc.). Must obtain 80% of the items correct. A holistic evaluation is also completed to assess candidate's overall strengths and weaknesses.	215 scoring units comprised of: grammar, false cognates, general vocab., technical vocab., idioms, numbers, names, dates, modifiers for emphasis, register and style, special position of words, and slang/colloquial language. Must score 70% on each section of the exam.

APPENDIX 12 - STANDARD DISTRIBUTION OF SCORING UNITS FOR CONSORTIUM ORAL EXAMS

The following chart was taken from page 12 of the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts' *Court Interpreter Oral Examination: Test Construction Manual*:

SCORING UNIT CATEGORY	SIGHT E - FL	SIGHT FL - E	CON	SIM	UNIT TOTAL	TARGET %
A: Grammar	4	4	15	10	33	15
B: Language Interference	3	3	9	6	21	10
C: General Vocabulary	8	8	15	13	44	20
D: Legal Terms and Phrases	3	3	11	16	33	15
E: Idioms and Sayings	0	0	7	4	11	5
F: Register	1	1	5	3	10	5
G: Numbers and Names	1	2	6	5	14	7
H: Markers, Intensifiers, Emphases and Precision	3	3	9	7	22	10
I: Embeddings and Position	1	1	9	8	19	9
J: Slang and Colloquialisms	1	0	4	3	8	4
Total	25	25	90*	75	215	100

* Some early versions of the Consortium's exams included 75 scoring units in the consecutive section. Subsequent exams include 90 scoring units.

APPENDIX 14 – CALIFORNIA AND CONSORTIUM ORAL CERTIFICATION EXAM COMPARISON

SIGHT TRANSLATION – ENGLISH TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Test Segment	Consortium Oral Exam	California Oral Exam
Time Allowed	6 minutes (includes prep time)	6 minutes (includes prep time)
Length of Passage	200-225 words	290 words (avg.)
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	25	25
Percent of Total Test	11.60%	22%
Description of Passage	Police or investigative reports	Legal vocabulary

SIGHT TRANSLATION – FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH

Test Segment	Consortium Oral Exam	California Oral Exam
Time Allowed	6 minutes (includes prep time)	6 minutes (includes prep time)
Length of Passage	200-225 words	280 words (avg.)
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	25	25
Percent of Total Test	11.60%	22%
Description of Passage	Correspondence, affidavits (relatively formal language)	Correspondence, affidavits (relatively formal language)

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETATION

Test Segment	Consortium Oral Exam	California Oral Exam
Time Allowed	22 minutes	20 minutes (approx)
Length of Passage	850-950 words	900-1,000 words
Length of Utterances	1-50 words	1-40
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	40 (English to Foreign Language) 50 (Foreign Language to English)	50
Percent of Total Test	41.90%	33%
Description of Passage	Witness Testimony (direct or cross – State Court) Candidate is permitted two repetitions.	Witness Testimony (direct or cross – State Court) Candidate is permitted six repetitions.

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION - MONOLOGUE

Test Segment	Consortium Oral Exam	California Oral Exam
Time Required	7 minutes	3 ½ minutes
Length of Passage	800-850 words	470 words (avg.)
Rate of Speech	120 wpm	120-140 wpm
Number of Scoring Units/ Elements	75	50
Percent of Total Test	34.90%	22%
Description of Passage	Opening/Closing Argument	Opening/Closing Argument

OVERALL ORAL TEST INFORMATION

Test Segment	Consortium Oral Exam	California Oral Exam
Oral Format	Sight translation (English to Foreign Language/ Foreign Language to English); Simultaneous (English to Foreign Language-120 wpm) Consecutive (English to Foreign Language/ Foreign Language to English)	Consecutive (English to Foreign language/Foreign language to English); Sight translations (English to Foreign language/ Foreign language to English); Simultaneous (Foreign language to English, 120-140 wpm).
Oral Cut-off Score	215 scoring units comprised of: grammar, false cognates, general vocabulary, technical vocabulary, idioms, numbers, names, dates, modifiers for emphasis, register and style, special position of words, and slang/colloquial language. Must score 70% on each section.	General rating of 1-5 for both language proficiency and interpreting skills. Candidate must score 4 or above in all language proficiency component ratings. Candidates must score 4 or above in all interpreting skill components or 4 or above in three of the four components and 3+ in any one remaining component except the consecutive section.
Oral Administration	Uses pre-recorded simulations of courtroom activity. Retake policies vary by state.	Uses pre-recorded simulations of courtroom activity. Offered several times throughout the year. Once a candidate passes the written exam he/she is given 4 attempts to pass the oral exam (there is no time limit to complete the 4 attempts). Candidates must retake all parts of the oral test if one part is failed. If a candidate fails to take and/or pass the oral exam after 4 attempts, he/she must restart the certification process.